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VII. *A Letter on the Retreat of Swallows in Winter. From the Reverend Mr. PACKARD.*

Marlborough, January 13th, 1791.

S I R,

IN a review published in England, of the first volume of the Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, I noticed particularly the observations it contained, upon your letter to the late Governour Bowdoin, respecting the torpid state of house-swallows in winter. The reviewers, you recollect, conclude with wishing for the most circumstantial confirmation of the fact, if it be a fact, that those birds exist in mud during the cold season. Knowing your curiosity, and having accidentally received some hints tending to the subject, I pursued them to the following effect.

Lieutenant Nathaniel Orcutt, now living in Bridgewater, a gentleman of indubitable veracity, with whom I am personally acquainted, in answer to a letter, wrote me, that Mr. Ignatius Turner, formerly of Scituate, now deceased, a man of truth and probity, had repeatedly told him, that in Scituate, a mill-pond being drawn off suddenly by a breach in the dam, he saw the swine of that neighbourhood rooting up house swallows from the mud, from which the water was drained. Being in the winter season, it was a matter of speculation to others as well as to himself. He saw them eating the swallows, he said, and saw the wings of some lying on the mud, after the swine had done rooting. He
wrote

wrote me further—that Captain Polycarpus Edson of Bridge-water, merchant, gave him the following account, the truth of which Mr. Orcutt does not scruple, viz. That he, Captain Edson, being at a place called Egg Harbour, in the month of February, about seventeen years ago, observed a large cedar blown down, near his work, which raised a root proportioned to its trunk. The next day, being the remarkably cold Sabbath, which many among us have sufficient reason to remember, in company with another man, now living in a neighbouring state, he went to this tree, and found a large number of house swallows sticking in the mud of the root, and in that from which the root was torn. The weather was so extremely severe, that such as were naked, wholly uncovered, were not only torpid, but frozen. Prompted by curiosity, they dug into the mud, which the root had left; and found, as he expressed it, swallows as thick as one could lie by the side of another. Taking one that was not frozen, they carried it to their temporary cottage, and laid it by a fire. The little bird, as if February and May had exchanged places, soon perceived the difference of air, began to move; balance her wings; and to resume her natural activity: but the experiment, being attended with some difficulty, was given up with this observation, “with a little attention, she would undoubtedly fly in an hour or two.”

Since the receipt of Mr. Orcutt's letter, I have seen Captain Edson. He related these facts to me nearly in the same manner; and, in some instances, used the same terms and phrases contained in the letter. He added, that by what they saw, there must have been bushels of swallows
which

which that tree covered in its natural state. The tree stood in poachy land, covered with moss, a mere morass, without any sward :—many holes and chasms appearing near where the tree stood, he supposes, they descended in those apertures, which were probably filled, or nearly filled with water at the time of their entrance.

Captain Edson told me, he was ready to make oath to this narrative ; and that he scrupled not a deposition to the same purpose, might be obtained of——(I cannot recollect his name) the man, who was in company with him at Egg-Harbour.

I have said, I could place entire confidence in Lieutenant Orcutt as a man of truth ; and now say, I have not the smallest reason to doubt of Captain Edson's veracity.

Whether you will think this letter entitled to a silent acknowledgment, I cannot say ; but you know my cheerfulness in complying with any request, with which you are pleased to honour me, and that

I am,

Honoured Sir,

Very affectionately,

Yours,

ASA PACKARD.

The Hon. SAMUEL DEXTER, Esq. F. A. A.